



## The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32 Lesson Plans

WRM Season 3 Session 1 : Storytelling, Arts & Crafts, Movement & Games

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### OVERVIEW SECTION

#### How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

**How to Read This Lesson Plan** (defines all components of the lesson plan)

**Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation** (a reminder of why we do this)

**Scripture(s) for the Session** (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

**Key Verses & Theology** (background for teachers to ponder)

**Themes to Focus on from the Scripture** (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

**Preparation** (including supplies needed)

**Classroom Statement** (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

**Step-by-step process of the lesson** (including the scripture to be read)

**Suggested variations for age groups** (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

#### Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation:

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

#### Scripture(s) for the Session: Luke 15:11-32

*Please READ this aloud in every class you teach.* The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

**Key Verses & Theology:** These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

*12 So the father divided his property between the two sons and gave the younger son his inheritance/share.* The father in this story is representative of God. So when we look at what the characteristics of the father are, then that also helps us to think about what God's characteristics are, too. In this part of the story, we see that the father is generous. And we also see that the father does *not* try to stop the younger son from making a grave mistake. The father doesn't say, "You shouldn't be doing this." He doesn't say, "Why don't you wait a few years." He doesn't say, "No, you cannot be trusted." He doesn't say, "You'll get it when I die." Instead, the father gives his son an abundant gift with no strings attached. This is a great amount of trust the father displays. But what is the father trusting? The son? His own abundance of property? Or maybe himself – that he has done a fine job of parenting? Regardless of what he is trusting, there is a serenity and calmness and graciousness about the father that appears attractive, though at this part of the story, maybe also naïve.

*21 Then the younger son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* The younger son had to experience life outside of his father's realm before he "comes to his senses" and returns home. Upon return, the son confesses what he has done wrong. And what is it that he confesses? That he has lived in a way that makes him no longer appear to be the father's son. Thinking back to Genesis and thinking about what image humankind is made in (God's), this is a very apt statement about who we become when we live outside of God's realm. Like the son who no longer fairly represents his father, when we live outside the Kingdom of God, we no longer fairly represent our Creator. We no longer reflect the goodness and abundance and trust and calmness that are the characteristics portrayed by the father in this story. And when we live like that, when the son lives like that, we do a disservice to ourselves and to God.

*24 let us eat and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!* But what is the father's response to his son, to this son who has misrepresented his image to the world? Surprisingly it is to rejoice! And celebrate! To welcome his son home with open arms. The father forgives and embraces. This is like how as parents we often respond, too. However, for the father, the "fear part" of the response is missing. For instance, if you somehow lose track of your child in a store and then find him/her again. You want to hug them AND scold them, right? Like, "Oh honey, there you are! Are you ok? I love you so much..." Give hug. Hold on. Then take a step back and... "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? You scared me to death! Don't ever do that again!" But that part never happens in this story with the father. It is all celebration for the father.

*31 Then the father said to [his older son], "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.* But the fear part *does* happen with the older son. The older son is the one who is grouchy about the younger son's return. So what does the father do with the older son? He's just as gracious and generous and calm with him as he is with the younger son! He gently, lovingly and correctly points out to his older son that there's no reason to be upset. He then reminds his older son that the most important thing is that he's always with him. So going back to the characteristics of the father, the most amazing one is that of trust (an emotion that is opposite of fear). The father is so full of trust that he's never afraid. There's no room for fear. And if the sons (old and young) are always with him, then what do *they* need to fear? Nothing.

They just need to trust him. The older son doesn't, of course, and that's the problem. He's afraid that the younger son is going to get some of what belongs to him. And in this regard, by the end of the story, the younger son knows more than the older son.

**Themes to Focus on from the Scripture:** Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

**Trust/Letting go** – When we're afraid of losing something, we clamp down on that which we are afraid of losing. The father in this story does just the opposite. The father in the story lets go of his younger son and of his money/possessions in order to give it to his younger son. And then when the son comes back, the father doesn't have to scold his son with the "Told you so" speech. Instead, because he was able to let go of his son and avoid the dynamic of his son wrenching away, then there is not a burned bridge. The son can return. With God, the same dynamic is at play. God's not afraid of losing us. And so God lets us make bad decisions without us having to wrench ourselves away from God, making the return, if we choose, possible.

**Money/Stuff/Possessions** – It's very easy to believe that our things can save us. If only we could win the lottery. If only we could have a better paying job. If only we had that certain kind of computer/car/kitchen/college education that we always wanted, then life would be so much better. And even though our culture repeatedly tells us this idea, it simply is not true. Money and possessions do not save us from our own ways. In fact, money and possessions often enable our more self-destructive ways. This is what the younger son had to experience and see first-hand. And once he did, then he "came to his senses" and returned back to his father's realm.

**Confession** – A way to return to God's Kingdom is to admit (or *confess*) the ways that caused us to leave in the first place. The son confesses that he has "sinned" against heaven and against his father. The word, sin, here, means separation. The son chose separation, he lived in a way that was not in the image of his father. To come back to his father and to live his father's way is to confess that living outside of his father's image/way didn't work. It wasn't the better way.

**Restoration** – Even before the son confesses that his way doesn't work, he is welcomed back with open arms by his father. The confession by the younger son allows him to receive his father's warm welcome. Their relationship is restored not because the son confesses and the father forgives, but because the father has and always will love the son, and the son needs to confess how he kept his father's love at bay. With the younger son's attempt at separation confessed, then the younger son doesn't need try to stop his father's party for him. Instead, it's the older son who is trying to interfere with the restoration. And that is because there are ways that the older son has not confessed to (ways that he chooses) that cause separation from his father. But once he confesses and chooses to live in relationship instead of separation, then he too can enjoy a similar reception from his loving father, just like his younger brother did.



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## THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

### Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching.
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: 2 easels and paper, markers to write with on the easel paper, two tennis rackets, a table, chairs (one per student) and two pennies.

### Classroom Statement

This Movement and Games class consists of reading the story of the Prodigal Son, and two activities/games to help demonstrate the concepts of (self) discovery and restoration.

### Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

**SHEPHERD ASKS** "Question of the Day."

### **INTRODUCE yourself**

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

**PRAY** Short and simple is perfect. For example:

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

### **TELL**

- We're going to read a story that Jesus tells to others.
- This type of story is called a parable.
- A parable is a teaching tool used to help people think about a certain idea.
- This particular parable is often called, "The Prodigal Son." Prodigal means "really really wasteful."
- But the story isn't just about the son. It's also about the father.
- Listen for what the father says to his both his younger and older son.

### **READ Luke 15:11-32**

11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So the father divided his property

between the two sons and gave the younger son his inheritance/share. 13 A few days later the younger son packed, took his inheritance and traveled to a distant country. There, he squandered his property in wasteful living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in great need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The son would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating because no one gave him anything. 17 Then he came to his sense and he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger?! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is now found!" And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27 The servant replied, "Your brother has come back, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because your brother has returned safe and sound.' 28 Then the older son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with wasteful spending, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was gone, dead it seemed, but now he has returned, as if from the dead; he was lost and has been found."

### **ASK (answers in parentheses)**

- At the beginning of the story, what does the younger son ask for? (his inheritance)
- What is an inheritance (its usually means the things your parents want you to have after they die)
- Did the father give the inheritance to his younger son? (yes)
- Did the father try to talk his son out of the inheritance? (no)
- What did the son do with his inheritance? (spent it all)
- Then what was the son doing? (eating what the pigs were eating)
- So what did the son decide to do? (go home)
- How did his dad receive him? (With joy and open arms – threw him a party!)

### **TELL**

- In this story, the father is a lot like God and we are a lot like the son.
- We have been given a lot by God, but yet we want more.
- And God gives it to us, like the father gave the inheritance to his son.

- But when we mess-up and lose (or misuse) what we're given, then, if we come back to God, God welcomes us back with open arms.

## EXPLAIN

- The younger son has to learn something about himself before he can appreciate and like the life he has with his father: He has to *discover* what life is like without his father.
- We're going to play a game of discovery now.

## HOW TO PLAY:

- We're going to split into two teams.
- One team will be on one side of the table, the other team will be on the other side of the table
- Each team must pick one student on each team to be the leader.
- I am now going to hand to just one of the teams, a coin.

## EXPLAIN HOW TO PLAY THE GAME:

- When I say "GO," the team with the coin will start passing the coin back and forth among each other, underneath the table
- Here's a hint: You will NOT want to look at your hands while doing this.
- After a short period of time, the leader of the other team will shout, "Up, Prodigal Son!"
- The team with the coin must quickly raise your closed fists above your heads.
- The leader of the other team will then shout, "Down. Prodigal Son!"
- At that point, the team with the coin will slap your opened hands on the table, palms down (we might want practice this a few times before we begin).
- The team without the coin needs to listen carefully for the coin hitting the table so they can identify the player who is concealing the coin.
- The team guessing should discuss in secret before announcing who they think the culprit is.
- One by one, the leader of the team without the coin says the names of the players on the opposing team, *trying to eliminate those players who don't have the coin.*
- When a player's name is called, they must lift their palms from the table to show the coin isn't there.
- If the coin is revealed before the last player's name is called, the team with the coin wins a point.
- However, if the team correctly identifies the culprit, then that team gets a point.
- Then the teams switch roles.
- The first team to 3 points wins! (if it's a fast game, do it again)

## DO Find-the-Coin Game

## ASK

- When playing the game, what clues did you use to figure out who had the coin?
- So even though there were clues, and you suspected who had the coin, how did you actually find out who had the coin? (you had to see it for yourself – you had to *discover* it)

## TELL

- This type of discovery is often what happens for us. We hear how life with God is better, but sometimes we have to go see for ourselves what life without God is like.
- Very often, that doesn't end so well.
- But if we choose to come back to God and live life God's way, God welcomes us back with love, joy and open arms.
- In the story, when the son returns to his father, he shares how he separated himself from his father. When we share something that we did wrong that is called a confession. The younger son confessed to his dad how he had messed up.
- His father is very happy and excited to have his son home and their relationship is *restored*.
- To restore a relationship is to make it right.
- We're going to do an activity that demonstrates what restoration looks like.

## EXPLAIN

- Let's line up and make the lines as equal in number as possible.
- I have a two big sheets of paper here on two easels very close to the start of each line.
- I want the person in the front of each line to write their name on the paper in front of them in the upper left hand corner.
- Once you do that, go to the back of the line.
- The next person, I want you to write your name under the first person's name, but leave some room so that you could write the first person's name in-between your name and that person's name.
- (Repeat process through until everyone's name in the line is on the sheet)
- Now, each line gets one tennis racket.
- Each person in line has to put the top of the racket on the ground and then put their forehead on the bottom of the handle and spin around 10 times. After you do that, you need to write your name right under where you wrote it the first time.
- First line done, wins. So don't take too long on your spins.
- On your mark, get set, Go!

## DO Spinning game

### ASK/TELL

- When comparing your two signatures, what one looks better? (the first one...hopefully!)
- Now let's pretend that your first signature is what your signature usually looks like so that after you're done being dizzy, and you wrote your name, it'd look like the first signature.
- Does anyone think they can write their name like they did the first time? Or are you still too dizzy?
- (Let them all try...one more time through the line!)
- Ah-ha! You're mind and body has been restored, has been made right. It got a little off-course when you got dizzy, but now that you are restored, your signature looks like it did in the beginning.
- And this is what happened with the father/son relationship in the story.

- The relationship was good, but then the son went away and lived his own way. This made the relationship not work as well, just like your second signature didn't work as well.
- But then the son realized that the first way was better and came back. And then, like your third signature, the relationship between father and son was restored.
- This is how it can be with us and God as well.
- Jesus tells us this story so that we can remember that when we get dizzy and maybe make some silly decisions, we can come to God and confess the mistakes we made, ask for help and then experience God welcoming us back with joy and love.
- And that's the good news for today!

## **CLEAN UP**

### **Suggested Variations for age groups**

The youngest students may not be able to write their names. Have them draw a square instead. Or a stick figure.